



*“Behind every Palestinian there is a general fact...
once – and not so long ago – (he or his ancestors) lived in a land of his own
called Palestine, which is now no longer his homeland.”* Edward Said

Pax Christi International Recognises the 75th Anniversary of the Nakba

Seventy-five years ago, the Palestinian people experienced a great catastrophe - the Nakba – an event so devastating that its repercussions continue until this day.

In 1948, the State of Israel was established. To accomplish this, more than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled, forced by violence, fear, or intimidation to flee their homes. Over 400 Palestinian towns and villages were intentionally destroyed by the militias that would later become the Israeli Defense Forces. Thousands more became Internally Displaced People within the newly created State of Israel. All were and continue to be denied their right to return in violation of UN Resolution 194 and Article 13(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Generations of Palestinian refugees were created, many still clutching their house keys and Ottoman documents of land ownership.

May 15th is the day the Nakba is mournfully commemorated with 1948 seen as the pivotal year when the destruction, erasure, and settler-colonisation of Palestine was most aggressively executed. However, what reached its zenith between 1947 and 1949 had been preceded by many years of a slow and methodical effort to accomplish the goal of creating a Jewish State in Palestine. Emboldened by the 1917 Balfour Declaration, crafted to serve the geopolitical interests of the day, this sixty-seven-word letter gave legitimacy to that vision, effectively giving one people’s land to another.

A seminal event in the history of the Palestinian people, the Nakba is often ignored, given a cursory mention, or denied. Yet, As Yara Hawari, senior analyst at Al-Shabaka, has stated it is “the single event that connects all Palestinians to a specific point in history. Whether living in exile as refugees, as nominal citizens of Israel, under military occupation in the West Bank, or under siege in Gaza”.¹ Like all atrocities, the Nakba must be recognized for the cataclysmic event it was and continues to be. The devastation inflicted upon an entire population cannot be minimized. To do so dehumanizes

¹ Yara Hawari, “Palestine Sine Tempore?” Rethinking History 22, no 4 (2018): 167

¹ Greg Shupak, “Erasing the Nakba, Upholding Apartheid” Institute of Palestine Studies, Issue no. 8 (2022): 9

the pain of millions of people, “suggesting that Palestinians are not worthy of having crimes committed against them acknowledged and mourned”.²

As Palestinians commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba, it is crucial to see, as they do, that the Nakba was not solely a historical milestone but a never-ending scourge. Today, the trauma of the Nakba continues with every eviction order, home or school demolition, military incursion into a village, refugee camp, or place of worship, destruction of treasured ancient olive trees and confiscation of land and every child or political prisoner held in the black hole of administrative detention.

A delegation of Pax Christi International members recently traveled to the Holy Land. What they witnessed and heard constituted the unmistakable results of the ongoing Nakba.

They witnessed the suffering of Palestinians who have lived for nearly six decades under a brutal Israeli military occupation. They saw first-hand the expansive Israeli settlements and numerous outposts, all illegal under international law, that continue to grow, consuming more and more Palestinian land. They stood next to the towering wall, which fragments Palestinian land into enclaves, cutting Palestinians off from each other and their land. They heard accounts of increasing violent settler attacks, often perpetrated under the watchful eye of Israeli soldiers. They walked through a demolished home – one of the thousands crushed under Israeli bulldozers in pursuit of Israeli expansion in the West Bank. They spoke with Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem who are threatened with eviction to enable more settlers to reside in what was to be the capital of the State of Palestine. They ate with a Bedouin family whose whole community may soon be forcibly expelled. They conferred with the Latin Patriarchs, past and present, and other religious leaders, all of whom expressed deep concern for the survival of the 2000-year-old Christian community.

We know that those in key leadership positions who permit such a situation to continue, are aware of the devastating impact and sordid reality Palestinians face every day. We are compelled to ask - when will they put aside meaningless comments of concern and act to bring freedom, justice, and dignity to the Palestinian people as they have promised.

On this sombre day, Pax Christi International calls on the international community to demand an end to the relentless ongoing Nakba. Without deliberate actions to halt the expansion of settlements, the military occupation of the West Bank, and the stranglehold siege of Gaza, the Palestinian people will not be able to wake from the nightmare they have been living for over seven decades. Recognition of the past and accountability for Israel’s continued efforts to rid the land between the river and the sea of its indigenous people are crucial steps to finally bringing peace with justice and dignity to all those living in the Holy Land.